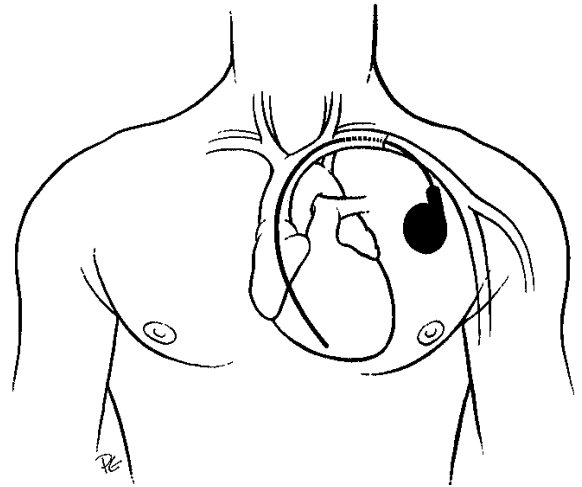


What Is a Pacemaker?

A pacemaker is a small unit that uses batteries to help your heart beat more regularly. It does this with a small electric stimulation that helps control your heart-beat. Your doctor puts the pacemaker under the skin on your chest, just under your collarbone. It's hooked up to your heart with tiny wires.

You may need a pacemaker to keep your heart contracting and pumping blood adequately. In this way your body gets the blood, oxygen and food that it needs. Some people just need a pacemaker for a short time (like after a heart attack) and may use a kind that's outside the skin. The battery unit for this type can be worn on a belt.



With a pacemaker, your heart should pump almost as well as it did before. Today many people with pacemakers lead full, active lives.

Why would I need one?

- Your heart beats too slowly.
- Your heart doesn't beat regularly.
- There's a block in your heart's electrical pathways.

How does it work?

- A pacemaker uses batteries to send electric signals to your heart to help it pump the right way.
- An electrode is put next to your heart. Tiny electric charges that you can't feel move through the wire to your heart.
- Pacemakers work only when needed. They go on when your heartbeat is too slow.

How do I live with my pacemaker?

- Check your pulse and keep a record of it the way your doctor tells you.
- Your doctor will teach you how to know when you need new batteries and how to replace them.
- Take your medicine the way your doctor tells you.
- Tell your doctor if you have trouble breathing, if you gain weight or get puffy legs or ankles, or if you faint, black out or get dizzy.
- Follow all doctor's instructions and keep your appointments.
- Carry an I.D. card with you so others know you have a pacemaker.

- Tell your other doctors and your dentist that you have a pacemaker. Certain types of medical equipment may affect how a pacemaker works.
- Tell airport security that you have a pacemaker.
- Household microwaves, electric appliances, most office and light shop equipment DO NOT affect your pacemaker.
- If you work around industrial microwaves, electricity, cars or other large motors, ask your doctor about possible effects.

Do I have to take it easy?

- Most people lead full lives with their pacemaker.
- It's good to do some physical activity every day.
- You can exercise if your doctor says so.
- You shouldn't overdo it — stop before you're tired.
- You can have sex.

How can I learn more?

- Talk to your doctor, nurse or health care professional. Or call your American Heart Association at 1-800-242-8721.
- If you have heart disease or have had a stroke, members of your family also may be at higher risk. It's very important for them to make changes now to lower their risk.

Do you have questions or comments for your doctor?

- Take a few minutes to write your own questions for the next time you see your doctor. For example:

How long will my batteries last?

When can I take showers and baths?



South Carolina Department of Health
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Fighting Heart Disease and Stroke

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Your contributions to the American Heart Association or the American Stroke Association will support research that helps make publications like this possible.

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